

Conor Williams, *Washington Post* (blog)

Almost no one noticed, but last night, the House took up S. 987, The *International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act* of 2010. For many, this is an easy issue to forget. Child brides across the world have no lobby to maintain congressional and media attention. Neither party made the American international development agenda central to their electoral strategy in 2010. We have more than enough crises to occupy our attention here at home.

For others (myself included), it's an issue that can't be ignored. Last night during House debate, Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.) explained what's at stake:

Globally, more than 60 million girls under the age of 18, many only 12 or 13, are married, usually to men more than twice or three times their age. Between one half and three-fourths of all girls are married before the age of 18 in countries such as Chad, Mali, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Rep. Betty McCollum (D-Minn.) noted that the bill appropriates no new funds and thus does not affect the federal deficit as it is currently structured. In its current form, S. 987 simply makes child development a key priority within the existing U.S. international development agenda. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the bill could cost \$67 million over five years, only if Congress appropriates this money later. But Republicans, led on the floor last night by Representative Dan Burton (R-Ind.), are trying to block the bill's passage on the grounds that "the bill does not reflect current fiscal realities."

This is a pretty cynical position to take, given that the bill doesn't actually appropriate any new funds. It's also worth noting that the potential appropriations that the bill might get later are minuscule in comparison to most budgetary items. How can Republicans explain efforts to defeat a human rights bill because of \$67 million in potential spending while simultaneously pushing for a tax cut deal for wealthy Americans that will add \$858 billion to the deficit? Is this at all credible? Remember that the Senate unanimously passed the bill!

The final vote is scheduled for today. Last word goes to Rep. McCollum: "It doesn't matter where in the world an eleven-year-old girl is: She should never be anyone's wife."